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Violence and its consequent injury and death represent a major health problem in this country. The United States has one of the highest homicide rates in the industrialized world: ten times higher than that of England and twenty times higher than that of Spain. Fatalities from violence represent only the tip of the iceberg: nonfatal intentional injuries occur as many as one hundred times more frequently; assault and intentional injuries identified in medical studies can be four times those reported to the police, suggesting that medical institutions are a primary site for identification of individuals with violence-related problems. Violence and its consequences must be perceived as a serious and large-scale problem that needs to be addressed by the health care community. The magnitude and characteristics of violence-related problems cry out for new and creative approaches to prevention and treatment and provide insight into the direction that needs to be taken. Although there will be no easy answers or solutions to the problem, it is essential that support be developed for experimental efforts. The health community cannot ignore the problems associated with violence and can, in fact, make a real contribution to their resolution through prevention, treatment, and research.

Public health practitioners have a long history of collaboration with public schools to safeguard the lives of children. To protect them from measles, mumps, polio, and diphtheria, public health officials have used the legal clout and administrative resources of schools to require immunizations.

At school, children are screened for vision and hearing difficulties, for tuberculosis, for scoliosis, and for other remediable conditions. In the classroom, health education is a staple. Children are taught about fitness, human reproduction, nutrition, and substance abuse. At school-based clinics, students are able to receive comprehensive services that may include treatment for minor ailments like a sore throat and receive a sports physical or even counseling for depression. When violence is addressed as a public health problem, strategies like these traditional school-based prevention strategies may be used.

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Two strategies for violence prevention in the schools are discussed in this chapter. The first is improving the learning environment and the academic achievements of students; the second is teaching the skills of getting along and violence prevention within the schools. Special attention is paid to the needs of the African-American male student, who is at greatest risk for becoming another homicide statistic in America.

Learning itself is a vital form of violence prevention. The cognitive skills children develop during years of studying English, social studies, math, and science help them reason their way through stressful and dangerous situations. Young people who possess superior language skills and analytic abilities are better equipped to use words instead of force to persuade. Brain power can help adolescents to imagine and respect differing viewpoints in order to understand the consequences of certain actions and envision various options when confronted by conflict. In poor urban neighborhoods, all adolescents are at risk for violence, but those who have been taught to think decisions through clearly are less at risk than others. The various circumstances that prevent children from learning reasoning skills promote violence.[1]

Improving Schools

African-American boys are by far the most isolated group in most of the nation's urban schools, even within systems that are predominantly African-American. Few school systems have detailed the carnage as has Milwaukee. Of the city's 5,716 African-American males in high school, only 135 earned a B average or higher last year. Overall, African-American children have a grade point average of D plus. While African-American children account for 55 percent of the system's population, they were handed 94 percent of suspensions from 1978–1985. Milwaukee's failures are particularly painful, after nearly three decades of attempted desegregation.[2]

These disheartening statistics tell the sad story of our nation's academic failure, a failure that is as true in Boston, Atlanta, and Chicago. Deciding to do something different and creative, the Milwaukee school board, in fall 1991, opened two experimental primary and middle schools geared to the specific needs of African-American males. The schools' curricula are designed to provide pupils with positive information about their African heritage. Students must wear uniforms. The school day includes an after-school enrichment program. There are mandatory Saturday classes. Every student in the two schools spends time each day with an adult male mentor.[3]

The Milwaukee experiment is of great interest not only for its academic implications but also for its implications concerning violence prevention. Children who succeed at school are at less risk for violence than their nonsuccessful peers. The young males who fail and drop out of school are the ones who are dying on our streets. This correlation between violence and school failure is true for all groups of young people in our society. However, greater attention must be given to black males who perform more poorly in school than any other segment of our population and are more likely to die as victims of homicide.

In our nation's schools, as on our streets, young black men are a truly endangered species. Nationally, they do worse on all standardized tests, including the tests needed to enter college, than any other group. They are expelled and drop out of high school more frequently. They drop out of college more often, and their grades

in high school and college are worse than those of any other segment of the school population.[4]

Tragically, more young black males are in prison than in college.[5] Approximately one in four African-American males between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. One in five are enrolled in a two- or four-year college program. In 1988, nearly 700,000 African-American women were enrolled in colleges and universities; fewer than 450,000 young black males were in college. (These figures should not be interpreted to mean that young black females are doing as well as they should be.)[6]

The societal antagonism and racism in our society exclude young black males from higher education and misshape their early educational experience. They are labeled academically and behaviorally deficient and driven out of college-track courses. Of the students labeled behavior disabled, 73 percent are young black males. Suspension rates for them exceed those for any other group. So do high school drop-out rates. In Boston, school officials say, 46 percent of students who enter the ninth grade do not graduate. In Los Angeles and Chicago, 45 percent do not graduate. In New York City, the "official" drop-out figure is 34 percent. For young men of color in these cities, the percentage of nongraduates is much higher.[7] In Detroit's poorest neighborhoods, for example, school officials say that as many as 80 percent drop out.[8]

Many teachers and administrators blame black kids personally for their "failure to learn," saying peers, drugs, and gangs have created an urban black youth culture that is completely incompatible with intellectual pursuits. No doubt black youth culture plays a part in keeping black kids, especially males, outside the educational mainstream. Still, blaming this problem on the kids themselves seems absurd. Most teachers say that every child begins first grade excited and hungry to learn. This is as true for black children as for white, and as true for boys as for girls. All children want to learn, but poor black children, especially males, all too often encounter circumstances that dampen and then kill their excitement.

A significant body of research indicates that teacher and administrator prejudice about their abilities plays a significant role in snuffing out the intellectual ardor of African-American school kids. Social scientists and educators have proved time and again that children tend to perform academically as they are expected to perform. By and large, children whose parents and teachers expect them to work hard and achieve do just that. When teachers, administrators, and parents do not expect much, children do not rouse themselves. Children who are labeled as C students tend to do C work. Children who are labeled dumb tend to become dumb to meet the expectations of those in authority. This process works for all children, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. For black children, low expectations are especially destructive. One lingering legacy of slavery and racial injustice is the idea, often unstated but present nevertheless, that black people are intellectually inferior. Many white people consciously or unconsciously believe this. Many black people consciously or unconsciously believe it, too. This idea is a powerful barrier to school achievement.[9]

Negative and even hostile notions about the academic proficiency of young blacks are acted on by teachers who are not aware of their own prejudices. In one study carried out in Illinois, each of sixty-six student teachers was told to teach a math concept to four pupils, two white and two black, all of equal, average intelligence. The student teachers were told that in each set of four, one white and one black student

was intellectually gifted, the others average. The student teachers were monitored through a one-way mirror to see how they reinforced their students' efforts. The "superior" white pupils received two positive reinforcements for every negative one, while superior intelligence was crushed in the "superior" black pupils. The "average" white students received one positive reinforcement for every negative reinforcement. The "average" black students received one positive reinforcement for every 1.5 negative reinforcement while the "superior" black students received one positive response for every 3.5 negative ones. Jeffrey Howard, a Harvard-trained social psychologist who works with school systems all over the country in an effort to improve black school achievement, believes that the Illinois study raises very important issues. The heavy dose of negative "reinforcements" heaped upon the "superior" black students delivers a message, Howard says, that being black and intelligent are not reconcilable. Superior intelligence was nurtured in the "superior" white pupils. The teachers delivering these disheartening messages to young blacks were not from an older, burned-out generation. They were young people, presumably eager and idealistic, but blind to their own cultural biases.

The negative expectations and negative reinforcement of teachers clearly plays a part in destroying the enthusiasm of young blacks for school. "Spirit murder," Jeff Howard calls this process. Many observers noted that by the third or fourth grade, African-American children, particularly boys, begin to shut down academically. At this point significant differences between the school performance of young whites and young blacks start to emerge, and they continue and broaden over the years. They appear to be unrelated to the natural talent of African-American students. The results of a study by educational consultant Kawanza Kunjufu illustrated this point. Kunjufu looked at the school records of twenty randomly selected young black males who had been in the same school for five years. Each child's score on the Iowa Reading Test at the beginning of the third grade was compared to his score at the end of the seventh grade. Students who scored very high in the third grade collapsed academically by the time they were tested again. Four young males who were reading in the 98th, 97th, 92nd, and 91st percentiles at the time of the first test sank to the 35th, 54th, 24th, and 68th percentiles, respectively, when tested four years later. Kunjufu says his study shows that the males of color who fail in school are not necessarily the least intellectually gifted — and may be the most gifted.[10]

No one knows all the reasons that cause black students, especially boys, to tune out as their years in school progress. We can surmise that as children move toward adolescence, the attitude of their teachers toward them probably grows more negative. Nine- and ten-year-old students are a lot less cuddly and charming than six-year-olds. Inner-city children of nine and ten may start to exhibit the cool, street-wise attitude, highly valued and respected by certain street cultures, in an effort to "fit in." These changes in behavior and attitude may further estrange students from their teachers. No doubt there are other reasons as well. Developmentally, children in the third and fourth grades are increasingly able to make judgments about themselves in relation to the world. James Comer, a professor of child psychiatry at Yale University, says that at this age children begin to understand where they stand in the American hierarchy. When kids realize that they are not part of the economic and social mainstream, Comer believes, they stop trying to bond with school and with teachers. They lose faith in the school's power to educate them, in their own power to become educated, and in the notion that any of it matters. A tragic cynicism seems to fall

over them. They opt out of school and the values embraced by teachers. Instead, they cultivate an air of aloof "cool." What counts, they say, is "getting mine now."[11]

By the time kids like this reach high school, many are deficient in reading and math skills. Some are assigned to unchallenging special education classes. Others warm chairs in academic classes in which all who show up receive a passing grade, especially those with athletic ability. Many students drop out. For those who continue, school may be unpleasant and dangerous, a place where the code of the street is allowed to rule indoors. Violent attacks on students and teachers are common in many urban schools. Kids may join gangs and arm themselves for "protection." Drug dealing may surround the school or even enter it. In a setting like this, students, teachers, and administrators feel betrayed and endangered. Students say teachers and administrators do not care about them. Teachers and administrators say students do not care about learning. Teachers and administrators, unable to feel pride or satisfaction in their work, may wind up hating themselves and the children they are supposed to be teaching. At its worst, the relationship between students and adults in the schools is as laden with resentment and rage as the relationship between young black males and some police officers.

For some teachers, the students become the enemy. One Bronx teacher who taught in both elementary and high schools spoke about his feelings in these two environments:

> When I walked into an elementary class, my heart went out to the kids. I'd do anything to make their lives better. When I walked into a high school class, with a lot of tough, angry black kids, my heart nearly stopped. If I closed my eyes I could imagine myself getting into an argument with one of these guys and getting punched out. After I had words with a kid and I'd see him in the hall or in the parking lot, I'd think, shit, here comes the switchblade.

For students, the interaction is just as fraught with emotion. Many feel disliked, misunderstood, and used by teachers and administrators. A young man who went to college and became a youth worker in Newark described his high school experience this way:

> Inside I was really hurting, although I didn't want to admit it . . . I was hurting myself in the streets. I was hurting all over. I just didn't want to be part of that [school] anymore. I wanted to escape. I wanted to change my life. The first semester in high school I scored high in my classes, but I couldn't see myself continuing up to the twelfth grade. I was saying, I'll be nineteen when I get out of here, twenty. So I wanted a way out — and the school and me, we worked out a way.

The young man got drunk, entered the school, committed serious acts of vandalism — and was expelled. His feelings about what he did are revealing: "I was striking back at the educational system and it felt good. I could be just as tough and rough with them as they was with me."[12]

Helping Kids Succeed in School

Albert Holland, principal of the Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Boston, expressed his philosophy as follows:

> You don't need a lot of rules to run a school, but the ones you have need to be clear and they need to be enforced. At our school every kid knows what the rules are: you have to be in class on time. No hats are allowed inside the building. No Walkman inside the building. No gold jewelry visible inside the building. And no students roaming the corridors. If you are caught outside of class without a pass you are written up immediately and given a warning.

There are schools in every city of our nation where children feel safe and where they learn a great deal. There are teachers, thousands of them, who know how to teach, who love to teach, who do teach every day. There are poor youngsters of color, tens of thousands of them, who do well in school. The formula for success is no mystery. Research shows that schools with strong principals, schools that are not too large, schools where discipline is fair but firm, schools where teachers are imbued with high expectations for every child, schools where parents are drawn into the educational orbit, are schools where learning takes place.[13]

The first requirement is that students, teachers, and administrators feel safe. It does not take a Joe Clark patrolling the hallways of Eastside High in Paterson, New Jersey, with a bullhorn and a baseball bat, expelling hundreds of "leeches and parasites," to create a safe environment, but it does take commitment. Safety has to be the first priority. If students are carrying guns to school, metal detectors are required. At the Jeremiah E. Burke School there is no metal detector. The presence of Mr. Holland, many teachers, and a staff of security guards in the hallways is sufficient to maintain order. Security personnel have positive relationships with the students. This emphasis on maintaining a safe environment helps parents, teachers, and students feel secure.

Making schools secure is easier than raising the academic performance of students. Even exceptional school personnel cannot control the diverse forces that shape the ability and willingness of students to commit themselves to their schoolwork. Learning is a cumulative process. Even in a firm-but-fair school environment, teenagers who have not mastered the basics have a difficult time performing at or near grade level.

Gifted teachers, when supported by their principals and a challenging curriculum, are able to burst through some of these impediments. The best known of this impressive breed is Jaime Escalante of Garfield High School in Los Angeles, once a haven for gang members and school failures. Escalante, whose story was told in the popular film *Stand and Deliver,* teaches advanced placement math, including calculus, to poor black and Hispanic kids. These are the same children written off by school officials as too "dumb" to learn these subjects.

Each Escalante class begins with warm-up music and hand clapping as students ceremonially drop their homework into a basket. Advanced placement students are given special T-shirts and satin jackets proclaiming their membership in the academic elite. When Escalante joined the faculty in 1976, Garfield was close to losing its academic accreditation. Thanks to his commitment to excellence and his belief in the capability of his students, the school now boasts more than a dozen advanced placement teachers. Hundreds of kids take and pass advanced placement tests each year, earning college credit. Of the student body, 70 percent go on to college.

Escalante nudges, tugs, and cajoles parents, who often feel intimidated by teachers and schools, into committing themselves to their children's educational

goals. Escalante reaches out to parents. When pupils cut class, Escalante calls their parents at home. He also visits students' homes, inducing parents to sign contracts pledging that they will use their authority to see that their children do extra hours of homework. In effect what Escalante does is teach parents how to be involved with their child's education.

A certain kind of parental involvement appears to be the most important factor determining academic success of poor children and probably all children. Researcher Reginald Clark conducted an in-depth study of ten poor black families, five with high-achieving high school children, five with low-achieving offspring, to find out how the home lives of academically successful African-Americans differed from the home lives of young African-Americans who were failing.[14] As a result of this work, Professor Clark believes that race, socioeconomic status, and parental marital status are irrelevant to a child's academic achievement. What counts, he says, is a certain style of high-profile parenting.

Clark discovered that the parents of the academically successful young people in his study, all of whom were poor and lived in poor neighborhoods, shared certain traits: they all believed that education could make the lives of their children better, and they shared this belief with their children. They helped prepare their young children for school by talking to them, reading to them, playing word and math games with them. They trained their small children to do homework by setting aside a time and place for them to work every day, so that by the time their children were in high school, disciplining themselves to do their work came naturally. They supervised their children's leisure time, limiting their access to risky peers and activities, and they encouraged their children's efforts with love and support. Though poor, these parents and their offspring were not defeated by poverty. What protected them was their shared belief in their own ability to make life better.

Relatively few children have parents whose belief in education is so powerful that it can overcome poor schools, indifferent teachers, and peers who are hostile to education. Such parents are a national treasure, and they are important role models to all of us who want our children to do well, but parents cannot remake our schools. Institutional change is also needed.

Opposing a traditional approach to education, Dr. Jeff Howard of the Efficacy Institute believes that anyone who is smart enough to learn a spoken language by the age of three or four is smart enough to learn anything, including calculus. The Efficacy people point to the success of teachers like Jaime Escalante to prove their point. Intelligence, they say, is not something you are born with, like blue eyes. Intelligence in their view is a kind of muscle that is developed with use. You are not born smart, you get smart. Confidence in yourself, plus serious effort, they say, makes people smart. Howard and his colleagues came to this conclusion after careful study of the "very smart" children at the academic pinnacle.

Decades of research into human motivation shows that children who perform well in school come from environments that have filled them with the necessary confidence to commit themselves to hard work. This finding is consistent with the findings of Reginald Clark mentioned previously. Because these children think they can do the job, they work hard and prove to themselves that they can do the job. The more they succeed, the more inspired they are to work hard and succeed more. The opposite kind of "feedback loop" is at work when students fail. If they think that they cannot do the job, and if the environment delivers messages telling them that

they haven't got "what it takes," they will not work hard: why should they? As a result, they fail, and that failure appears to be proof that they are dumb. The more they and their teachers believe they are dumb, the less incentive they have to work hard. The less they work, particularly in cumulative subjects like math and foreign languages, the "dumber" they become. The children who think they are smart go to school and get smarter. The children who think they are dumb go to school and get dumber.[15]

The consultants at the Efficacy Institute work with teachers and school administrators, helping them peel away layers of destructive thinking about intelligence and achievement. During an intensive week-long seminar, teachers learn how erroneous assumptions about academic capability have damaged their own self-concept. After all, every teacher was once a child in school who learned that he or she belonged in a niche, often well below the top. Realizing how they themselves have been hurt by these assumptions, teachers begin to empathize with their less successful students. Efficacy shares with teachers all the social science research highlighting the way the unconscious biases of teachers shape their interactions with minority students. When teachers recognize the kinds of destructive forces that have been holding their students back, they can begin to change their classrooms. Once they begin to believe in every child's ability to learn, they can convey with conviction that they expect success, not failure, from each and every student.

The school systems with which Efficacy has worked have registered improvements in student performance. Other educators and consultants around the country are doing similar work with positive results. These fledgling efforts are of enormous political and economic significance. Two of our nation's most pressing needs converge within the public schools: the need of American business for an educated workforce and the need of all children, especially young black males, for a route out of academic failure, self-destruction, and violence.

Preventing Violence

Schools can prevent violence by ensuring that all children are well served academically and by teaching children to manage conflict and anger. When children learn how to assert their own needs and opinions without trampling on the rights of other people and how to express their angry feelings without losing control or hurting other people, they have truly mastered skills that enhance both their lives and their community. There is no better place than school, where diverse groups of children congregate, to learn these important lessons.

Programs in many schools all over the country have been designed to help schoolchildren with what one school teacher calls "the fourth R, relationships." The goal of these "conflict resolution" programs is to teach children how to get along with one another peacefully. All of these programs share certain ideas:

- That conflict is a normal part of human interaction.
- That when people take the time to explore their prejudices, they can learn how to get along with (and enjoy) people who are different.
- That most disputes do not have to have a winner or loser. Win/win is the ideal way to resolve most disputes.

- That children and adults who learn how to assert themselves nonviolently can avoid becoming bullies or victims.
- That the self-esteem and productivity of children will be enhanced if they learn to build nonviolent, nonhostile relationships with their peers.

Public School 321 is an integrated grade school in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, New York. The school's elaborate Peacemakers program is sponsored jointly by the New York City Board of Education and the independent Educators for Social Responsibility. One-quarter of the thousand students at P.S. 321 are African-American; one-quarter are Hispanic; one-half are white. Some children are rich, some are middle class, some are poor, and some are very, very poor. Different groups of kids play together, and they are required to get along.

Peacemaker teachers are trained in "conflict resolution" techniques, observed and critiqued in the classroom, and then receive follow-up training. Children as young as five and six are taught how to stand up for themselves without triggering an aggressive response from their peers. Children learn to assert what they need, using the pronoun I: "I wish you would stop using my toys," instead of, "Gimme back my truck, you creep." Children learn "strong, instead of mean" ways to respond: "Don't bother me," instead of, "Get your ugly face out of here." The lessons of assertion and civility are taught formally and then incorporated into the daily life of the classroom. Interestingly, the research shows that children who learn to assert themselves without verbally or physically attacking others are not only less likely to become bullies, they are also less likely to become the victims of bullies. The kinds of interpersonal skills children develop when schools make a commitment to "the fourth R" can be impressive.

Mediation is the second component of the Peacemakers program. At P.S. 321, fourth- and fifth-grade children are elected by their classmates and trained to negotiate settlements when disputes break out among their peers. A faculty adviser helps the young mediators to improve their listening skills and teaches them how to help disputants resolve their differences. Working in pairs and wearing special T-shirts, young mediators are assigned to patrol the playground and the lunchroom. When they see children arguing or fighting, they approach and ask if their help is needed. The disputants can either accept or reject mediation. The program provides all the children in the school with a model of a successful nonviolent strategy for resolving disputes. The mediators themselves are changed by the job: they see themselves as peace-promoting leaders.

Peer mediation on the high school level is known to reduce fighting as well as suspensions and expulsions. Generally, when a fight breaks out in a high school with a well-organized mediation program, the disputants are given a choice between mediation and, say, a one-week in-school suspension. Most students choose mediation. The mediators, who are trained and supervised by faculty advisers, work in teams. The mediation itself takes place quickly (to prevent rumors from complicating the process) and in private. Both sides agree to confidentiality. High school mediators, with their adviser present, also mediate disputes between teachers and students. The mediation process has several steps: (1) each side is allowed to air its grievance, uninterrupted; (2) mediators help each side clarify its grievance — often the issue at the heart of the dispute is not immediately apparent; (3) the mediators keep both sides talking to one another until they agree on the nature of the problem; (4) the media-

tors help the two sides work out a balanced settlement that each side accepts as fair; and (5) the mediators write up the settlement and have it signed by both sides. Students who have had a fight settled by mediation may be asked to become mediators.[16]

Mediators can sometimes intervene before the fact, preventing violence from occurring. Fights almost always have an escalation period, sometimes lasting for several days. Events during this time have an almost choreographed quality. Insults are exchanged. Students take sides. Rumors fly. Excitement grows. Teachers and school administrators often know what is going on, but feel powerless to halt the process leading to a fight. If student mediators can talk with the rivals when the fight is brewing and convince them to submit their dispute to mediation, a peaceful solution can sometimes be worked out. Mediations like this can be lifesaving.

"Conflict resolution" and mediation go hand in hand with my violence prevention curriculum. Violence prevention, however, is more crisis driven. If all children mastered the lessons taught at P.S. 321, and we stopped glamorizing violence in the media, teaching violence prevention might not be necessary. Until that happy day, I think it is extremely important to help teenagers understand the risk of violence to their survival, to learn about their own anger, and to learn some practical skills for deflecting angry confrontations and fights.

Students are interested in violence prevention. Many of them have never had the chance to talk to anyone about fighting, violence, or death. When the subject of violence is initiated, sleepy and indifferent young people snap to attention. Ron Ferguson, an associate professor of public policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, reports the conversation he had with the leaders of a mentoring program for black males in Pittsburgh. The adult mentors told Ferguson that they were surprised by the kind of program their young friends wanted:

> "What they wanted from us was help with intellectual and emotional development. They wanted to deal with issues of manhood — what being a man is all about — with issues like sexuality and drugs. They wanted to deal with violence in the schools and protecting themselves . . .
>
> "A number of them had a desire to learn how to control their emotions, for example, when they don't agree with a teacher or don't appreciate the way a teacher or an authority figure 'comes off' to them, belittling them or making them feel stupid. They wanted to know how to react to that. Typically, if it's a teacher, their usual reaction was to get smart, get into an argument, and get kicked out of class. If it's a fellow student who they have a problem with, they get into an argument and it breaks out into a fight. In other words, in reaction to feeling put down they would lose control of their emotions and get into trouble."[17]

Teaching Violence Prevention

The Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents teaches young people alternatives to fighting.[18] The first three lessons of the ten-session curriculum provide adolescents with information about violence and homicide. Urban teenagers are not surprised to learn that most homicides occur among people of the same race and people who know each other. This fact corresponds to their experience. They are surprised to find out that gangs and drugs do not cause 80 or 90 percent of all homicides. This misperception is as self-serving for them as it is for the rest of society. Like adults, young people would rather think that Uzi-toting, crack-selling gang

members are responsible for the violence. No one wants to face the ordinariness of most assaults and homicides. No one wants to admit that many of these crimes involve plain people: acquaintances, family members, who drink, who disagree, and who have guns.

Some of the most interesting classes occur in the next set of lessons. These deal with the nature of anger. The goal is to help students understand that anger is a normal emotion that they will not outgrow, an emotion that everyone learns to handle without hurting themselves or others. We start by having the students list all the things that make them angry. Many have never reflected on anger this way before. A fast-writing teacher can travel around the room filling up blackboard after blackboard with things that students say make them angry.

Among the approximately one hundred entries compiled by one class of inner-city youths were extremely serious items such as drugs, gangs, and teenage pregnancy, and items that seemed silly and "adolescent." Other examples are: someone dies, VD, ignorant people, drug addicts, police, teachers who accuse you of cheating, teachers who have favorites, girls who have short hair, girls who won't buy you anything, girls who try to get you to support a baby that's not yours, threat of nuclear war, no money, parents who try to tell you what to do, men who talk to young girls, people who don't wash, dandruff, boys who are homosexuals, boys who "stick and kick" (get a girl pregnant and then leave her), people who think school is a beauty parlor, smoking on the bus, boys with pierced ears.

The next lesson is designed to help teenagers think about the way they deal with their own anger. Students list all the ways they respond when angry and then rate them as healthy or unhealthy. Students tend to be quite imaginative in their healthy strategies. Some of the healthy ways students report responding to anger include:

- Read a book, walk, leave — walk away (Kids saw this as potentially healthy and potentially unhealthy).
- Listen to music, have sex (Young people tend to see sex as a "healthy" way to deal with anger; adults do not. The discussion that follows can be interesting).
- Lock yourself in your room, hang out, argue (Arguing they see as healthy or unhealthy, depending on the circumstances).
- Sleep, watch TV, slam doors, talk on phone, bite nails, grit teeth, yell/scream, sing, eat, play ball, do homework, take a bath, count to ten, lift weights, talk it out, cry, meditate, throw things that can't be broken.

Their unhealthy list included: take it out on someone else, drink alcohol, take drugs, fight/kill, attempt suicide, mark on walls, rob people.

Fighting, of course, is always on the list. In the next lesson we do a cost/benefit analysis of fighting. We have students create two lists, one describing what is good and the other what is bad about fighting. This leads students to the realization that they have more to lose than to gain from fighting. This conclusion is drawn from the students' list; it is not a teacher-imposed insight. Inevitably, the "bad" list is longer and more impressive than the "good" list. There really is much more to lose than to gain from fighting. Here is the list created by one class:

What's Good and What's Bad about Fighting

Good	Bad
winning	kill someone
prove your point	get killed
get a reputation	might lose
get attention	get embarrassed
enjoyment	get suspended from school
relieves tension	get expelled
evens the score	lose a job
satisfaction	get a bad reputation and no one wants to hang out with you because you're always fighting
earn money (become a pro)	have an enemy coming after you
	revenge cycle begins
	get clothes dirty or torn
	get scarred for life
	may have to pay for broken things
	lose respect of friends
	parents responsible for medical bills
	get punished
	hurt innocent bystanders
	hurt person, then be sorry

Looking at this list — their own — students begin to think about fighting. Many of the males have never considered not fighting. They begin to question their own values. They also question mine. They want to know where I stand. "Does this mean," they ask me, "that you would never fight?" I tell them that I am not a pacifist, that I do think there are issues that are worth fighting for and perhaps even dying for. I would fight to protect my husband and children if I believed that fighting was the only way to save them from imminent danger. I would not fight because someone called me, or my husband or children, a name. Many of the students attribute my attitude about fighting to my sex.

"What about your husband?" they want to know. One student asked me what I would expect my husband to do if he were walking down the street with our daughter and a man on the other side of the street started calling her names. For me, of course, the answer is easy. I would expect Charles to ignore the insults, explain to Mimi that they were not going to listen to such foolishness, then walk in the other direction as quickly as possible. The mere asking of this question is an important reflection of the level at which many adolescents think about these issues. The combination of their age-appropriate narcissism and the special emphasis that adolescents put on respect hobbles their ability to make distinctions between real and trivial threats.

Interviewed by Professor Ron Ferguson, the head of the Pittsburgh mentoring program had an interesting comment that illuminates the issue of respect: "One of the things that we observed," he said, "was that the young men had a difficult time respecting one another: they wanted to receive respect, but they didn't have proper training to respect one another. We had to work on this with them." Many young black men seem to feel that showing respect for someone else is a form of toadying. The combination of their supersensitivity to slights and their lack of sensitivity to the feelings of others sets the stage for fights and violence.[19]

Another question that students often ask is, "What if someone calls your mother a bad name? Don't you have to fight then?" There is a certain sweetness and loyalty to their mothers inherent in this question that I find touching, but of course completely wrong-headed. "Look," I always answer, "so you get into a fight because someone calls your mother a bad name. You get your clothes torn, or you get thrown out of school for fighting, or maybe you get killed. Is that respectful of your mother? Don't you think your mother would rather that you come home alive, in one piece, that you stay in school and graduate? Isn't that the real way to show her respect?"

"Yes," they say, "but . . . but . . . but." This way of thinking makes some young people uneasy. I have never had a student convert to nonviolence right before my eyes, but I know they do think about what I am saying. In fact, you can see them thinking really hard during the classroom discussion. The whole point of the curriculum is to engage them, to make them think about their behavior, to make them understand the control they have over their behavior and to begin to question the inevitability of fighting.

A third question I am often asked by high school students is, "What would you do if someone just came up to you and hit you for no reason?" Again, this question is interesting as it highlights the psychological concerns of young people, especially young males, and their sense of being perpetually vulnerable — not only to the potential assaults of known foes, but to the potential assaults of strangers. I usually answer this question by saying that I do not know what I would do if randomly assaulted, but I would hope, given how common gun carrying has become, that I would be able to retreat. When facing any combatant in a fight, especially a stranger, one has no way of knowing if he or she is armed.

The point to remember, I say, is that there is almost always more to be lost than gained from fighting, and the list of what you can lose is topped by your most precious possession — your life. Then I explain that fights almost always have a history. Rarely does a stranger smack a stranger. I tell them that I feel certain that no one in the classroom has ever been the victim of a completely random assault. The students usually assent to this point. We can then talk about the kinds of fights they have had, the facts of which generally corroborate the statistics relating that most fights occur between people who know each other, who argue.

This discussion is a good lead-in to the concluding set of lessons in which mock fights — role plays — are created, staged, videotaped, analyzed, discussed, and then reworked with different endings. Students form into small groups to create their skits and rehearse. Each group of "actors" is asked to decide:

- Who is going to fight?
- What will they fight about?
- When will the fight take place?
- Who will be the friends, girlfriends/boyfriends, and onlookers?

The sketches must describe real-life circumstances. Students are not allowed to create role plays about strangers and criminal violence. Nor do we allow profanity. Skits continue right up to the moment in which the first imaginary punch is thrown. At that moment the teacher shouts "Cut" and the role play is over.

The goal of the role plays is to show kids — in reality to have kids show themselves:

- that most fights are imbedded in a series of relationships.
- that most fights have a history.
- that the best and safest time to intervene to stop a fight is early in its genesis, when the antagonists' animosity is just building.
- that there are techniques for preventing fights, once you recognize the patterns.

Each group of students presents its four- or five-minute playlets before the entire class. Videotaping, if possible, greatly improves the ability to analyze the plays. At the next class, the teacher shows the videotaped plays, first, however, allowing the students to get their fill of watching themselves "on television." Once the students have settled down, the teacher replays the tape prior to discussion and asks the class to decide at what point each fight could have been prevented.

Students pick the spot where a friend instigates the dispute by shouting, "Are you going to let that jerk stomp on your shoes?" when he could just as easily have said, "Hey, man, a little dirt on your sneaker is not worth fighting about"; "Hey man, take it easy, it was an accident"; or "Hey, man, let's give this hothead some room to chill out."

Students learn the most when they come up with their own strategies for stopping fights, but often it takes a lot of adult prompting for a teenager to see that he or she does not have to rise to every insult. One of the most talented people teaching the violence prevention curriculum, Ann Bishop, of Cathedral High School, always tells her students that the best way to respond to insults is with a nondefensive question: "Why would you want to say that?" or "Why would you want to tell me I am ugly (or dumb, or fat) and hurt my feelings?" This response stops the insulter short. Suddenly he or she is on the defensive.

By talking about these issues in the classroom, students have a chance to imagine nonviolent strategies for getting out of hot spots before they become embroiled in one. Another violence prevention colleague, Dr. Peter Stringham, a family practitioner who works in a health center serving a poor white neighborhood with a great deal of violence talks to all his adolescent patients about fighting and tries to get them to memorize a few stock answers that can help them avoid fights: "This isn't worth fighting about"; "If you've got a problem with me, I'll talk, but I don't want to fight"; "I have nothing against you and I don't want to fight."

Humor seems to be the best strategy for diffusing potentially violent situations. Some kids are absolute masters at using humor to lower the temperature of a tense interaction. They appear to do it intuitively. During one role play about a fight between two young males who were rivals for the same girl's attention, I saw a young male, who'd just been called a dumb, ugly blank-head by his rival turn sweetly to his foe and say, "I know you couldn't be talking to me." Everyone broke up — the other "actor," the whole class, I. For the quick-witted, this tactic works wonderfully to halt heated exchanges. Laughter removes the desire to hit. Unfortunately, not all of us have the talent to think of the perfect rejoinder when we are in a high-pressure situation.

Many students have a difficult time when we get to the end of the curriculum. They want a perfect strategy for avoiding fights that won't cause them any embarrassment or loss of social standing. Unfortunately, there are no such strategies, not for kids living in a society that largely condones violence. Children who choose not to fight are bucking the trend or, rather, they are beginning a new trend. It's not

easy. Ann Bishop tells the story of one of her students who really connected with the curriculum. Sometime after he took the course, he got into a conflict with another kid in which he was expected to do battle. The student used the techniques he had learned to prevent the fight. He probably prevented an injury, or even death. When the incident was over, however, the young man's friends did not praise his efforts. They thought he was a coward and told him so. Even his parents did not approve of his peacemaking. Afterward, the young man became depressed. He felt terrible. Part of him believed what the others were saying — that not fighting was unmanly. Bishop had to work with him for many months before he could begin to feel good about what he had done.

Educating students about violence in this society is not an easy process. But if we do not tell kids that it is all right to avoid a fight, no one else will. I think often about a young man I taught in one of my early violence prevention courses. The student talked about a friend of his who had been stabbed in a fight. The ambulance took about twenty minutes to arrive. The friend bled to death while waiting for medical help. The student was terribly hurt and angry about this death, which he felt was preventable. During the discussion that followed I understood not just with my head, but with my whole body, what I mean when I tell students that the violence prevention curriculum challenges them to claim their anger as normal and to use it to better themselves and their families.

In class that day we listed the young man's options:

1. He could beat up the ambulance driver.
2. He could slash ambulance tires and break ambulance windows.
3. He could take out his anger on a cat or dog.
4. He could beat up a little brother or sister or someone else.
5. He could write a letter to the city. (This is the typical adult, middle-class response, which has little meaning to poor kids. Letter writing, however, can work and adults should offer to help teenagers do it.)
6. The young man could get so angry that he decided to finish high school, become an ambulance driver, and hope to chart the response times of ambulances in every neighborhood in the city. If the response times in poor neighborhoods were longer than in affluent ones, he could blow the whistle.

The last option is a strategy of the oppressed that works. All our great black leaders, from Harriet Tubman to Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, have channeled their anger at injustice into a force to reshape the world. This is what the violence prevention curriculum is all about. It is not about passivity. It is about using anger not to hurt oneself or one's peers, but to change the world. ❧

Notes

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